

The Pastoral Suppressed by the Germans

CARDINAL MERCIER TO THE BELGIAN PEOPLE

[The facts, which appear to be substantiated beyond question, are that the printer of the pastoral was fined 600 marks (\$125); that the pastoral was peremptorily suppressed; that a German officer with a guard of soldiers called on His Eminence with some ready-made form of retraction which the Cardinal was requested to sign. On promising an answer after a reasonable time for consideration, the officer and soldiers, acting on instructions from headquarters, refused time to consider and took up their quarters in the Cardinal's residence.

Cardinal Mercier refused to retract.

He was "invited" not to leave his residence.

The dignified and fearlessly truthful Pastoral Letter of martyred Belgium's dauntless Primate is one of the finest evidences of simple but unflinching devotion to duty during a war relieved by many deeds of glorious heroism as well as blackened, alas! by unspeakable brutality.]

Following is the Pastoral in question:—

My very dear Brethren,—I cannot tell you how instant and how present the thought of you has been to me throughout the months of suffering and of mourning which we have passed through. I had to leave you abruptly on the 20th of August in order to fulfil my last duty towards the beloved and venerated Pope whom we have lost, and in order to discharge an obligation of the conscience from which I could not dispense myself in the election of the successor of Pius X, the Pontiff who now directs the Church under the title, full of promise and of hope, of Benedict XV.

It was in Rome itself that I received the tidings—stroke after stroke—of the partial destruction of the Cathedral church of Louvain, next of the burning of the Library and of the scientific installations of our great University and of the devastation of the city, and next of the wholesale shooting of citizens, and tortures inflicted upon women and children, and upon unarmed and undefended men. And while I was still under the shock of these calamities the telegraph brought us news of the bombardment of our beautiful metropolitan church, of the church of Notre Dame au dela la Dyle, of the episcopal palace, and of a great part of our dear city of Malines.

Afar from my diocese, without means of communication with you, I was compelled to lock my grief within my own afflicted heart, and to carry it, with the thought of you, which never left me, to the foot of the crucifix.

A FUNDAMENTAL TRUTH

I craved courage and light, and sought them in such thoughts as these: A disaster has visited the world, and our beloved little Belgium, a nation so faithful in the great mass of her population to God, so upright in her patriotism, so noble in her King and Government, is the first sufferer. She bleeds; her sons are stricken down, within her fortresses and upon her fields, in defence of her rights and of her territory. Soon there will not be one Belgian family not in mourning. Why all this sorrow, my God? Lord, Lord, has Thou forsaken us? Then I looked upon the crucifix. I looked upon Jesus, most gentle and humble Lamb of God, crushed, clothed in His blood as in a garment, and I thought I heard from His own mouth the words which the Psalmist uttered in His name: "O God, my God, look upon me; why hast Thou forsaken me? O my God, I shall cry, and Thou wilt not hear." (Psalm xxi, 1.) And forthwith the murmur died upon my lips; and I remembered what our Divine Saviour said in His gospel: "The disciple is not above the master, nor the servant above his lord." (Matthew x, 24.) The Christian is the servant of a God Who became man in order to suffer and to die. To rebel against pain, to revolt against Providence, because it permits grief and bereavement, is to forget whence we came, the school in which we have been taught, the example that each of us carries given in the name of a Christian, which each of us honors at his hearth, contemplates at the altar of his prayers, and of which he desires that his tomb, the place of his last sleep, shall bear the sign.

My dearest brethren, we shall return by and by to the providential law of suffering, but you will agree that since it has pleased a God-made-man Who was holy, innocent, without stain, to suffer and to die for us who are sinners, who are guilty, who are perhaps criminals, it ill becomes us to complain whatever we may be called upon to endure. The truth is that no disaster on earth, striking creatures only, is comparable with that which our sins provoked, and whereof God Himself chose to be the blameless victim.

Having called to mind this fundamental truth, I find it easier to summon you to face what has befallen us, and to speak to you simply and directly of what is your duty, and of what may be your hope. That duty I shall express in two words: Patriotism and Endurance.

PATRIOTISM

My dearest brethren, I desire to utter, in your name and my own, the gratitude of those whose age, vocation, and social conditions cause them to benefit by the heroism of others, without bearing in it any active part.

When, immediately on my return from Rome, I went to Havre, to greet our Belgian, French, and English wounded; when, later, at Malines, at Louvain, at Antwerp, it was given to me to take the hands of those brave men who carried a bullet in their flesh, a wound on their forehead, because they had marched to the attack of the enemy, or borne the shock of his onslaught, it was a word of gratitude to them that rose to my lips. "O valiant friends," I said, "it was for us, it was for each one of us, it was for me, that you risked your lives and are now in pain. I am moved to tell you of my respect, of my thankfulness, to assure you that the whole nation knows how much she is in debt to you."

For in truth our soldiers are our saviours.

A first time, at Liege, they saved France; a second time, in Flanders, they arrested the advance of the enemy upon Calais. France and England know it; and Belgium stands before them both, and before the entire world, as a nation of heroes. Never before in my whole life did I feel so proud to be a Belgian as when, on the platforms of French stations, and halting a while in Paris, and visiting London, I was witness of the enthusiastic admiration our Allies feel for the heroism of our Army. Our King is, in the esteem of all, at the very summit of the moral scale; he is doubtless the only man who does not recognize that fact, as simple as the simplest of his soldiers, he stands in the trenches and puts new courage, by the serenity of his face, into the hearts of those of whom he requires that they shall not doubt of their country. The foremost duty of every Belgian citizen at this hour is gratitude to the Army.

If any man had rescued you from shipwreck or from a fire, you would assuredly hold yourselves bound to him by a debt of everlasting thankfulness. But it is not one man, it is two hundred and fifty thousand men who fought, who suffered, who fell for you so that you might be free, so that Belgium might keep her independence, her dynasty, her patriotic unity; so that after the vicissitudes of battle she might rise nobler, purer, more erect, and more glorious than before.

Pray daily, my brethren, for these two hundred and fifty thousand, and for their leaders to victory; pray for our brethren in arms; pray for the fallen; pray for those who are still engaged; pray for the recruits who are making ready for the fight to come.

In your name I send them the greeting of our fraternal sympathy and our assurances that not only do we pray for the success of their arms and for the eternal welfare of their souls, but that we also accept for their sake all the distress, whether physical or moral, that falls to our own share in the oppression that hourly besets us, and all that the future may have in store for us, in humiliation for a time, in anxiety and in sorrow. In the day of final victory we shall all be in honor; it is just that to-day we should all be in grief.

To judge by certain rumors that have reached me, I gather that from districts that have had least to suffer some bitter words have arisen towards our God, words which, if spoken with cold calculation, would be not far from blasphemous.

Oh, all too easily do I understand how natural instinct rebels against the evils that have fallen upon Catholic Belgium; the spontaneous thought of mankind is ever that virtue should have its instantaneous crown, and injustice its immediate retribution. But the ways of God are not our ways, the Scripture tells us, Providence gives free way, for a time measured by Divine wisdom, to human passions and the conflict of desires. God, being eternal, is patient. The last word is the word of mercy, and it belongs to those who believe in love. "Why art thou sad, O my soul? and why dost thou disquiet me? *Quare tristis es anima, et quare conturbas me?*" "Hope in God. Bless Him always; is He not thy Saviour and thy God? *Spera in Deo quoniam ad huc confitebor illi, salutare vultus mei et Deus meus.*" (Psalm xlii, 5.)

When holy Job, whom God presented as an example of constancy to the generations to come, had been stricken, blow upon blow, by Satan, with the loss of his children, of his goods, of his health, his enemies approached him with incitations to rebellion; his wife urged upon him a blasphemy and a curse. "Dost thou still continue in thy simplicity? Curse God, and die." (Job ii, 9.) But the man of God was unshaken in his confidence. "And he said to her Thou hast spoken like one of the foolish women: if we have received good things at the hand of God, why should we not receive evil? *Dominus dedit, Dominus abstulit; sicut Domino placuit ita factum est. Sit nomen Domini benedictum.*" (Job ii, 10; i, 21.) And experience proved that saintly one to be right. It pleased the Lord to recompense, even here below, his faithful servant. "The Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before. And for his sake God pardoned his friends." (Job xlii, 8, 10.)

WHAT BELGIUM HAS SUFFERED

Better than any other man, perhaps, do I know what our unhappy country has undergone. Nor will any Belgian, I trust, doubt of what I suffer in my soul, as a citizen and as a Bishop, in sympathy with all this sorrow. These four last months have seemed to me age-long. By thousands have our brave ones been mown down; wives, mothers, are weeping for those they shall never see again; hearths are desolate; dire poverty spreads, anguish increases. At Malines, at Antwerp, the people of two great cities have been given over, the one for six hours, the other for thirty-four hours, of a continuous bombardment, to the throes of death. I have traversed the greater part of the districts most terribly devastated in my diocese (7); and the

(7) Duffel, Lierre, Berlaer Saint Rombaut, Konings Hove, Mortsel, Waelhem, Muesen, Wavre Sainte-Catherine, Wavre Notre-Dame, Sempst, Weerde, Eppeghe, Hofstade, Fleury, Rymenam, Eoort Maerbeck, Wespelaer, Haecht, Wechter-Wackerzeel, Rotselaer, Tremeloo; Louvain and its suburban environs, Blauwput, Kessel-Loo, Boven-Loo, Linden, Herent, Thildonck, Bueken, Reist, Aerschot, Weemaal, Harnelt, Diest, Schaffen, Molenstede, Rillaer, Gelrode.

ruins I beheld, and the ashes were more dreadful than I, prepared by the saddest of forebodings, could have imagined. Other parts of my diocese, which I have not yet had time to visit (8), have in like manner been laid waste. Churches, schools, asylums, hospitals, convents in great numbers, are in ruins. Entire villages have all but disappeared. At Werchter-Wackerseel, for instance, out of 380 homes, 130 remain; at Tremelo two thirds of the village are overthrown; at Busken, out of 100 houses, 20 are standing; at Schaffen 189 houses out of 200 are destroyed—11 still stand. At Louvain the third part of the buildings are down; 1,074 dwellings have disappeared; on the town land and in the suburbs, 1,823 houses have been burnt.

In this dear city of Louvain, perpetually in my thoughts, the magnificent church of St. Peter will never recover its former splendor. The ancient college of St. Ives, the art schools, the consular and commercial schools of the University, the old markets, our rich library with its collections, its unique and unpublished manuscripts, its archives, its gallery of great portraits of illustrious rectors, chancellors, professors, dating from the time of its foundation, which preserved for masters and students alike a noble tradition and were an incitement in their studies—all this accumulation of intellectual, of historic, and of artistic riches, the fruit of the labors of five centuries—all is in the dust.

Many a parish has lost its pastor. There is sounding in my ears the sorrowful voice of an old man of whom I asked whether he had had Mass on Sunday in his battered church. "It is two months," he said, "since we had a Church." The parish priest and the curate had been interned in a concentration camp.

Thousands of Belgian citizens have in like manner been deported to the prisons of Germany, to Munsterlag, to Celle, to Magdeburg. At Munsterlag alone three thousand and one hundred civil prisoners were numbered. History will tell of the physical and moral torments of their long martyrdom. Hundreds of innocent men were shot. I possess no complete necrology; but I know that there were ninety-one shot at Aerschot, that there, under pain of death, their wives were compelled to dig their graves. In the Louvain group of communes 171 men and women, old men and sucklings, rich and poor, in health and sickness, were burnt.

In a parish where I know that 13 priests or religious were put to death (9). One of these, the parish priest of Gelrode, suffered, I believe, a veritable martyrdom. I made a pilgrim's journey to him, and amid the little flock which so lately he had been feeding with the seal of an apostle, there did I pray to him that from the height of Heaven he would guard his parish, his diocese, his country.

We can neither number our dead nor compute the measure of our ruins. And what would it be if we turned our sad steps towards Liège, Namur, Audeene, Dinant, Tamines, Charleroi, and elsewhere? (10)

And there where lives were not taken, and there where the stones of buildings were not thrown down, what anguish unrevealed! Families hitherto living at ease, now in bitter want; all commerce at an end, all careers ruined; industry at a standstill; thousands upon thousands of working men without employment; working women, shop girls, humble servant girls without the means of earning their bread; and poor souls forlorn on the bed of sickness and fever, crying, "O Lord, how long, how long?"

THE SECRET OF GOD

There is nothing to reply. The reply remains the secret of God.

Yes, dearest brethren, it is the secret of God. He is the master of events and the sovereign director of the human multitude. *Domini est terra et plenitudo ejus; orbis terrarum est universi qui habitant in eo.* The first relation between the creature and his Creator is that of absolute dependence. The very being of the creature is dependent; dependent are his nature, his faculties, his acts, his works. At every passing moment that dependence is renewed, is incessantly re-asserted, inasmuch as, without the will of the Almighty, existence of the first single instant would vanish before the next. Adoration, which is the recognition of the sovereignty of God, is not, therefore, a fugitive act; it is the permanent state of a being conscious of his own origin. On every page of the Scriptures Jehovah affirms His sovereign dominion. The whole economy of the Old Law, the whole history of the Chosen People, have the same end—to maintain Jehovah upon His throne and to cast idols down. "I am the first and the last. I am the Lord, and there is none else; there is no God beside me. I form the light and create darkness. I make peace and create evil. Woe to him that gainsayeth his Maker, a sherd of the earthen pots. Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What art thou making, and thy work is without hands? Tell ye, and come, and consult together. A just God and a Saviour; there is none beside me."

(8) Hackendover, Roosbeck, Boutersem, Budingen, Neerlinder, Ottignies, Mousty, Wavre, Beyghem, Capelle-au-Bois, Humbeek, Nieuwenrode, Liezele, Londerzeel, Heyndonck, Mariekerke, Weert, Blaesvelt

(9) Their brothers in religion or in the priesthood will wish to know their names. Here they are:—Dupierreux, of the Society of Jesus; Brothers Sebastian and Allard, of the Congregation of the Josephites; Brother Candide, of the Congregation of the Brothers of Mercy; Father Maximin, Capuchin, and Father Vincent, Conventual; Lombaerts, parish priest at Boven-Loo; Goris, parish priest at Autgaerden; Carette, professor at the Episcopal College of Louvain; De Clerck, parish priest at Bueken; Dergent, parish priest at Gelrode; Wouters Jean, parish priest at Pont-Brulé. We have reason to believe that the parish priest of Hérent, Van Blade, an old man of seventy-one, was also killed; until now, however, his body has not been found.

(10) I have said that thirteen ecclesiastics had been shot within the diocese of Malines. There were, to my own actual personal knowledge, more than thirty in the diocese of Namur, Tournai, and Liège; Schlogel, parish priest of Hastière; Gille, parish priest of Couvin; Pieret,

Ah, did the proud reason of mankind dream that it could dethrone our God? Did it smile in irony when, through Christ and through His Church, He pronounced the solemn words of expiation and of repentance? Vain of fugitive successes, O light minded man, full of pleasure and of wealth, hast thou imagined that thou couldst suffice even to thyself? Then was God set aside in oblivion, then was He misunderstood, then was He blasphemed, with acclamation, and by those whose authority, whose influence, whose power had charged them with the duty of causing His great laws and His great order to be revered and obeyed. Anarchy then spread among the lower ranks of mankind, and many sincere consciences were troubled by the evil example. How long, O Lord, they wondered, how long wilt Thou suffer the pride of this iniquity? Or wilt Thou finally justify the impious opinion that Thou carest no more for the work of Thy hands? A shock from a thunderbolt, and behold, all human foresight is set at naught. Europe trembles upon the brink of destruction.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

Many are the thoughts that throng the breast of man to-day, and the chief of them all is this: God reveals Himself as the Master. The nations that made the attack, and the nations that are warring in self-defence, alike confess themselves to be in the hand of Him without whom nothing is made, nothing is done. Men long unaccustomed to prayer are turning again to God. Within the Army, within the civil world, in public, and within the individual conscience, there is prayer. Nor is that prayer to-day a word learnt by rote, uttered lightly by the lip; it surges from the troubled heart, it takes the form at the feet of God, of the very sacrifice of life. The being of man is a whole offering to God. This is worship, this is the fulfilment of the primal moral and religious law: the Lord thy God shalt thou adore, and Him only shalt Thou serve. And even those who murmur and whose courage is not sufficient for submission to the hand that smites us and saves us, even these implicitly acknowledge God to be the Master, for if they blaspheme Him, they blaspheme Him for His delay in closing with their desires.

But as for us, my brethren, we will adore Him in the integrity of our souls. Not yet do we see, in all its magnificence, the revelation of His wisdom, but our faith trusts Him with it all. Before His justice we are humble, and in His mercy hopeful. With holy Tobias we know that because we have sinned He has chastised us, but because He is merciful He will save us.

SOMETHING TO EXPIATE

It would, perhaps, be cruel to dwell upon our guilt now, when we are paying so well and so nobly what we owe. But shall we not confess that we have indeed something to expiate? He who has received much, from him shall much be required. Nay, are we say that the moral and religious standard of our people has risen as its economic prosperity has risen? The observance of Sunday rest, the Sunday Mass, the reverence for marriage, the restraints of modesty—what had you made of these? What, even within Christian families, had become of the simplicity practiced by our fathers, what of the spirit of penance, what of respect for authority? And we, too, we priests, we religious, I, the Bishop, we whose great mission it is to present in our lives yet more than in our speech, the Gospel of Christ, have we earned the right to speak to our people the word spoken by the apostle to the nations: "Be ye followers of me, as I also am of Christ?" We labour indeed, we pray indeed, but it is all too little. We should be, by the very duty of our state, the public expiators for the sins of the world. But which was the thing dominant in our lives—expiation, or our comfort and well being as citizens? Alas! we have all had times in which we, too, fell under God's reproach to His people after the escape from Egypt: "The beloved grew fat and kicked; they have provoked me with that which was no god, and I will provoke them with that which is no people." Nevertheless, He will save us; for He wills not that our adversaries should boast that they, and not the Eternal, did these things. "See ye that I alone am, and there is no other God beside me. I will kill and I will make to live, I will strike and I will heal."

God will save Belgium, my brethren; you cannot doubt it.

Nay, rather, He is saving her.

PATRIOTISM IN ACTION

Across the smoke of conflagration, across the stream of blood, have you not glimpses, do you not perceive signs, of His love for us? Is there a patriot among us who does not know that Belgium has grown great? Nay, which of us would have the heart to cancel this last page of our national history? Which of us does not exult in the brightness of the glory of this shattered nation? When in her throes she brings forth heroes, our Mother Country gives her own energy to the blood of those sons of hers. Let us acknowledge that we needed a lesson in patriotism. There were Belgians, and many such, who wasted their time and their talents in futile quarrels of class with class, of race with race, of passion with personal passion.

Yet when, on the 2nd of August, a mighty foreign Power, confident in its own strength and defiant of the faith of treaties, dared to threaten us in our independence, then did all

curate at Etalle; Alexandre, curate at Mussy-la-Ville; Maréchal, seminarist at Maissin; the Rev. Father Gillet, Benedictine of Maredsous; the Rev. Father Nicolas, Premonstratensian of the Abbey of Leffe; two Brothers of the same Abbey; one Brother of the Congregation of the Oblates; Poelkin, parish priest of Surice; Hollet, parish priest of Les Alloux; Georges, parish priest of Tintigny; Glouden, parish priest of Latour; Zeuden, retired parish priest at Latour; Jacques, a priest; Druet, parish priest of Acoz; Pollart, parish priest of Roselies; Labeye, parish priest of Blegny Trembleu; Thielen, parish priest of Haccourt; Janssen, parish priest of Heure le Romain; Chabot, parish priest of Forêt; Dossogne, parish priest of Hockay; Reussonnet, curate of Olme; Bilande, chaplain of the institute of deaf mutes at Bouge; Docq, a priest, and others.

Belgians, without difference of party, or of condition, or of origin, rise up as one man, close ranged about their own King and their own Government, and cried to the invader: "Thou shalt not go through!"

At once, instantly, we were conscious of our own patriotism. For down within us all is something deeper than personal interests, than personal kinships, than party feeling, and this is the need and the will to devote ourselves to that more general interest which Rome termed the public thing, *Res publica*. And this profound will within us is Patriotism.

Our country is not a mere concourse of persons or of families inhabiting the same soil, having amongst themselves relations, more or less intimate, of business, of neighborhood, of a community of memories, happy or unhappy. Not so; it is an association of living souls subject to a social organization to be defended and safe guarded at all costs, even the cost of blood, under the leadership of those presiding over its fortunes. And it is because of this general spirit that the people of a country live a common life in the present, through the past, through the aspirations, the hopes, the confidence in a life to come, which they share together. Patriotism, an internal principle of order and of unity, an organic bond of the members of a nation, was placed by the finest thinkers of Greece and Rome at the head of the natural virtues. Aristotle, the prince of the philosophers of antiquity, held disinterested service of the city—that is, the State—to be the very ideal of human duty. And the religion of Christ makes of patriotism a positive law; there is no perfect Christian who is not also a perfect patriot. For our religion exalts the antique ideal, showing it to be realizable only in the Absolute. Whence, in truth, comes this universal, this irresistible impulse which carries at once the will of the whole nation in one single effort of cohesion and of insistence in face of the hostile menace against her unity and her freedom? Whence comes it that in an hour all interests were merged in the interest of all, and that all lives were together offered in willing immolation? Not that the State is worth more, essentially, than the individual or the family, seeing that the good of the family and of the individual is the cause and reason of the organization of the State. Not that our country is a Moloch on whose altar lives may lawfully be sacrificed. The rigidity of antique morals and the despotism of the Cæsars suggested the false principle—and modern militarism tends to revive it that the State is omnipotent, and that the discretionary power of the State is the rule of Right. Not so, replies Christian theology; Right is Peace—that is the interior order of a nation, founded upon Justice. And Justice itself is absolute only because it formulates the essential relation of man with God and of man with man. Moreover, war for the sake of war is a crime. War is justifiable only if it is the necessary means for securing peace. St. Augustine has said: "Peace must not be a preparation for war; and war is not be made except for the attainment of peace." In the light of this teaching, which is repeated by St. Thomas Aquinas, Patriotism is seen in its religious character. Family interests, class interests, party interests, and the material good of the individual take their place, in the scale of values, below the ideal of Patriotism, for that ideal is Fight, which is absolute. Furthermore, that ideal is the public recognition of Right in national matters, and of national honour. Now there is no Absolute except God. God alone, by His sanctity and His sovereignty, dominates all human interests and human wills. And to affirm the absolute necessity of the subordination of all things to Right, to Justice, and to Truth, is implicitly to affirm God.

When, therefore, humble soldiers whose heroism we praise answer us with characteristic simplicity, "We only did our duty," or "We were bound in honor," they express the religious character of their Patriotism. Each of us does not feel that Patriotism is a sacred thing, and that a violation of national dignity is in a manner a profanation and a sacrilege.

THE REWARD OF THE SLAIN

I was asked lately by a Staff officer whether a soldier falling in a righteous cause—and our cause is such, to demonstration—is not veritably a martyr. Well, he is not a martyr in the rigorous theological meaning of the word, inasmuch as he dies in arms, whereas the martyr delivers himself, undefended and unarmed, into the hands of the executioner. But if I am asked what I think of the eternal salvation of a brave man who has consciously given his life in defence of his country's honour, and in vindication of violated justice, I shall not hesitate to reply that without any doubt whatever Christ crowns his military valour, and that death, accepted in this Christian spirit, assures the safety of that man's soul. "Greater love than this no man hath," said our Saviour, "that a man lay down his life for his friends." And the soldier who dies to save his brothers, and to defend the hearths and altars of his country, reaches this highest of all degrees of charity. He may not have made a close analysis of the value of his sacrifice; but must we suppose that God requires of the plain soldier in the excitement of battle the methodical precision of the moralist or the theologian? Can we who revere his heroism doubt that his God welcomes him with love?

Christian mothers, be proud of your sons. Of all griefs, of all our human sorrows, yours is perhaps the most worthy of veneration. I think I behold you in your affliction, but erect, standing at the side of the Mother of Sorrows, at the foot of the Cross. Suffer us to offer you not only our condolence but our congratulation. Not all our heroes obtain military honours, but for all we expect the immortal crown of the elect. For this is the virtue of a single act of perfect charity: it cancels a whole lifetime of sins. It transforms a sinful man into a saint. Assuredly a great and a Christian comfort is the thought that not only amongst our own men, but in any belligerent army whatsoever, all who in good faith submit to the discipline of their leaders in the service of a cause they believe to be righteous, are sharers in the eternal reward of the soldier's sacrifice. And how many there not be among these young men of twenty who, had they survived, might possibly have had the resolution to live altogether well, and yet in the impulse of patriotism had the resolution to die so well?

Is it not true, my brethren, that God has the supreme art of mingling His mercy with His wisdom and His justice? And shall we not acknowledge that if war is a scourge for this earthly life of ours a scourge whereof we cannot easily estimate the destructive force and the

extent, it is also for multitudes of souls an expiration, a purification, a force to lift them to the pure love of their country and to perfect Christian unselfishness?

ENDURANCE

We may now say, my brethren, without unworthy pride, that our little Belgium has taken a foremost place in the esteem of nations. I am aware that certain onlookers, notably in Italy and in Holland, have asked how it could be necessary to expose this country to so immense a loss of wealth and life, and whether a verbal manifesto against hostile aggression, or a single cannon-shot on the frontier, would not have served the purpose of protest. But assuredly all men of good feeling will be with us in our rejection of these paltry counsels. Mere utilitarianism is no sufficient rule of Christian citizenship.

On the 19th of April, 1839, a treaty was signed in London by King Leopold, in the name of Belgium, on the one part, and by the Emperor of Austria, the King of France, the Queen of England, the King of Prussia, and the Emperor of Russia, on the other; and its seventh article decreed that Belgium should form a separate and perpetually neutral State, and should be held to the observance of this neutrality in regard to all other States. The co-signatories promised, for themselves and their successors, upon their oath, to fulfil and to observe that treaty in every point and every article without contravention, or tolerance of contravention. Belgium was thus bound in honour to defend her own independence. She kept her word. The other Powers were bound to respect and to protect her neutrality. Germany violated her oath; England kept hers.

These are the facts.

The laws of conscience are sovereign laws. We should have acted unworthily had we evaded our obligation by a mere feint of resistance. And now we would not rescind our first resolution; we exult in it. Being called upon to write a most solemn page in the history of our country, we resolved that it should be also a sincere, also a glorious page. And as long as we are compelled to give proof of endurance, so long we shall endure.

All classes of our citizens have devoted their sons to the cause of their country; but the poorer part of the population have set the noblest example, for they have suffered also privation, cold, and famine. If I may judge of the general feeling from what I have witnessed in the humbler quarters of Malines, and in the most cruelly afflicted districts of my diocese, the people are energetic in their endurance. They look to be righted; they will not hear of surrender.

Affliction is, in the hand of Divine Omnipotence, a two-edged sword. It wounds the rebellious, it sanctifies him who is willing to endure.

God proveth us, as St. James has told us, but He "is not a tempter of evils." All that comes from Him is good, a ray of light, a pledge of love. "But every man is tempted by his own concupiscence." Blessed is he that endureth temptation, for when he hath been proved he shall receive the crown of life, which God hath promised to them that love Him."

Cruce, then, my brethren, to all murmurs of complaint. Remember St. Paul's words to the Hebrews, and through them to all of Christ's flock, when, referring to the bloody sacrifice of our Lord upon the cross he reminded them that they had not yet resisted unto blood. Not only to the Redeemer's example shall you look, but also to that of the thirty thousand, perhaps forty thousand, men who have already shed their life-blood for their country. In comparison with them, what have you endured who are deprived of the daily comforts of your lives, your newspapers, your means of travel, communication with your families? Let the patriotism of our Army, the heroism of our King, of our beloved Queen in her magnanimity, serve to stimulate us and support us. Let us bemoan ourselves no more. Let us deserve the coming deliverance. Let us hasten it by our virtue even more than by our prayers. Courage, brethren. Suffering passes away; the crown of life for our souls, the crown of glory for our nation, shall not pass.

DUTY UNDER INVASION

I do not require of you to renounce any of your national desires. On the contrary, I hold it as part of the obligations of my episcopal office to instruct you as to your duty in face of the Power that has invaded our soil and now occupies the greater part of our country. The authority of that Power is no lawful authority. Therefore in the soul and conscience you owe it neither respect, nor attachment, nor obedience. The sole lawful authority in Belgium is that of our King, of our Government, of the elected representatives of the nation. This authority alone has a right to our affection, our submission.

Thus, the invaders' acts of public administration have in themselves no authority, but legitimate authority has tacitly ratified such of those acts as affect the general interests, and this ratification, and this only, gives them juridic value.

Occupied provinces are not conquered provinces. Belgium is no more a German province than Galicia is a Russian province. Nevertheless, the occupied portion of our country is in a position it is compelled to endure. The greater part of our towns, having surrendered to the enemy on conditions, are bound to observe those conditions. From the outset of military operations the civil authorities of the country urged upon all private persons the necessity of abstention from hostile acts against the enemy's army. That instruction remains in force. It is our army, and our army solely, in league with the valiant troops of our Allies, that has the honour and the duty of national defence. Let us entrust the army with our final deliverance.

Towards the persons of those who are holding dominion among us by military force, and who assuredly cannot but be sensible of the chivalrous energy with which we have defended, and are still defending, our independence, let us conduct ourselves with all needful forbearance. Some among them have declared themselves willing to mitigate, as far as possible, the severity of our situation, and to help us to recover some minimum of regular civic life. Let us observe the rules they have laid upon us so long as those rules do not violate our personal liberty,

nor our consciences as Christians, nor our duty to our country. I do not take bravado for courage, nor tumult for bravery.

A WORD TO THE PRIESTS

You especially, my dearest brethren in the priesthood, be you at once the best examples of Patriotism and the best supporters of public order. On the field of battle you have been magnificent. The King and the Army admire the intrepidity of our military chaplains in face of death, their charity at the work of the ambulance. Your Bishops are proud of you.

You have suffered greatly. You have endured much calumny. But be patient; history will do you justice. I to-day bear my witness for you.

Wherever it has been possible I have questioned our people, our clergy, and particularly a considerable number of priests who have been deported to German prisons, but whom a principle of humanity, to which I gladly render homage, has since set at liberty. Well, I affirm upon my honor, and I am prepared to assert upon faith of my oath, that until now I have not met a single ecclesiastic, secular or regular, who had once incited civilians to bear arms against the enemy. All have loyally followed the instructions of their Bishops, given in the early days of August, to the effect that they were to use their moral influence over the civil population, so that order might be preserved and military regulations observed.

I exhort you to persevere in this ministry of peace, which is for you the sanest form of Patriotism; to accept with all your hearts the privations you have to endure; to simplify still further, if it is possible, your way of life. One of you who is reduced by robbery and pillage to a state bordering on total destitution, said to me lately: "I am living now as I wish I had lived always."

Multiply the efforts of your charity, corporal and spiritual. Like the great Apostle, do you endure daily the cares of your Church, so that no man shall suffer loss and you not suffer loss, and no man fall and you not burn with zeal for him. Make yourselves the champions of all those virtues enjoined upon you by civic honor as well as by the Gospel of Christ. "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever modest, whatsoever just, whatsoever lovely, whatsoever lovely, whatsoever of good fame, if there be any virtue, if any praise of discipline, think on these things." So may the worthiness of our lives justify us, my most dear colleagues, in repeating the noble claim of St. Paul: "The things which ye have learned, and received, and heard, and seen, in me, these do ye, and the God of peace shall be with you."

CONCLUSION

Let us continue, then, dearest brethren, to pray for penance, to attend Holy Mass, and to receive Holy Communion for the sacred intention of our dear country. . . . I recommend parish priests to hold a funeral service on behalf of our fallen soldiers, on every Saturday.

Money, I know well, is scarce with you all. Nevertheless, if you have little, give of that little, for the succour of those among your fellow countrymen who are without shelter, without fuel, without sufficient bread. I have directed my parish priests to form for this purpose, in every parish, a relief committee. Do you second them charitably and convey to my hands such aims as you can save from your superfluity, if not from your necessities, so that I may be the distributor to the destitute who are known to me.

Our distress has moved the other nations. England, Ireland, and Scotland, France, Holland, the United States, Canada, have vied with each other in generosity for our relief. It is a spectacle at once most mournful and most noble. Here again is a revelation of the Providential Wisdom which draws good from evil. In your name, my brethren, and in my own, I offer to the Governments and the nations that have succoured us the assurance of our admiration and our gratitude.

With a touching goodness our Holy Father Benedict XV, has been the first to incline his heart towards us. When, a few moments after his election, he deigned to take me in his arms, I was bold enough then to ask that the first Pontifical Benediction he spoke should be given to Belgium, already in deep distress through the war. He eagerly closed with my wish, which I knew would also be yours. To-day, with delicate kindness, His Holiness has taken the step to renounce the annual offering of Peter's Pence from Belgium. In a letter dated on the beautiful festival of the Immaculate Virgin, December 8th, he assures us of the part he bears in our sufferings, he prays for us, calls down upon our Belgium the protection of Heaven, and exhorts us to hail in the then approaching advent of the Prince of Peace the dawn of better days. Here is the text of this valued message:—

LETTER FROM THE POPE

"To our dear Son, Désiré Mercier, Cardinal Priest of the Holy Roman Church, of the title of St. Peter in Chains, Archbishop of Malines, at Malines.

"OUR DEAR SON,

HEALTH AND APOSTOLIC BENEDICTION

"The fatherly solicitude which we feel for all the faithful whom Divine Providence has entrusted to our care, causes us to share their griefs even more fully than their joys.

"Could we then fail to be moved by keenest sorrow at the sight of the Belgian nation which we so dearly love, reduced by a most cruel and most disastrous war to this lamentable state.

"We behold the King and his august family, the members of the Government, the chief persons of the country, bishops, priests, and whole people enduring evils which must fill with pity all gentle hearts, and which our own soul, in the fervour of parental love, must be the first to compassionate. Thus, under the burden of this distress and this mourning, we call

in our prayers for an end to such misfortunes. May the God of mercy hasten the day! Meanwhile we strive to mitigate, as far as in us lies, this excessive suffering. Therefore the step taken by our dear son, Cardinal Hartmann, Archbishop of Cologne, at whose request it was arranged that French or Belgian priests detained in Germany should have the treatment of officers, gave us great satisfaction, and we have expressed our thanks to him for his action.

"As regards Belgium, we have been informed that the faithful of that nation, so sorely tried, did not neglect, in their piety, to turn towards us their thoughts, and that even under the blow of so many calamities they proposed to gather this year, as in all preceding years, the offerings of St. Peter, which supply the necessities of the Apostolic See. This truly incomparable proof of piety and of attachment filled us with admiration; we accept it with all the affection that is due from a grateful heart; but having regard to the painful position in which our dear children are placed, we cannot bring ourselves to favour the fulfilment of that project, noble though it is. If any aims are to be gathered, our wish is that the money should be entirely devoted to the succour of the Belgian people, who are as illustrious by reason of their nobility and their piety as they are to-day worthy of all sympathy.

"Amid the difficulties and anxieties of the present hour we would remind the sons who are so dear to us that the arm of God is not shortened, that He is ever able to save, that His ear is not deaf to prayer.

"Let the hope of Divine aid increase with the approach of the festival of Christmas and of the mysteries that celebrate the birth of our Lord, and recall that peace which God proclaimed to mankind by His angels.

"May the souls of the suffering and afflicted find comfort and consolation in the assurance of the paternal tenderness that prompts our prayers. Yes, may God take pity upon the Belgian people, and grant them the abundance of all good.

"As a pledge of these prayers and good wishes, we now grant to all, and in the first place to you, Our dear son, the Apostolic Benediction.

"Given in Rome, by St. Peter's, on the feast of the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady, in the year MCMXIV, the first of Our Pontificate."

"BENEDICT XV, POPE."

One last word, my dearest brethren. At the outset of these troubles I said to you that in the day of the liberation of our territory we should give to the Sacred Heart and to the Blessed Virgin a public testimony of our gratitude. Since that date I have been able to consult my colleagues in the Episcopate, and, in agreement with them, I now ask you to make, as soon as possible, a fresh effort to hasten the construction of the national basilica, promised by Belgium in honour of the Sacred Heart. As soon as the sun of peace shall shine upon our country, we shall redress our ruins, we shall restore shelter to those who have none, we shall rebuild our churches, we shall reconstitute our libraries, and we shall hope to crown this work of reconciliation by raising, upon the heights of the capital of Belgium, free and Catholic, that national basilica of the Sacred Heart. Furthermore, every year we shall make it our duty to celebrate solemnly, on the Friday following Corpus Christi, the festival of the Sacred Heart.

Lastly, in every region of the diocese the clergy will organize an annual pilgrimage of thanksgiving to one of the privileged sanctuaries of the Blessed Virgin, in order to pay especial honor to the Protectress of our national independence and universal Mediatrix of the Christian commonwealth.

The present letter shall be read on the following dates—on the first day of the year and on the Sundays following the day on which it shall severally reach you.

Accept, my dearest brethren, my wishes and prayers for you, and for the happiness of your families, and receive, I pray you, my paternal benediction.

D. J. MERCIER,

Archbishop of Malines.